

AN ACT CONCERNING A PILOT PROJECT TO IMPROVE TRANSITIONAL SERVICES FOR EMPLOYABLE YOUNG ADULTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Submitted by: Karen Linder, 2 Brookside Drive, Clinton CT 06413

I am submitting this testimony in favor of passage of Raised Bill No. 6860.

I am here today on behalf of my 16 year old son, Henry. Henry has Autism Spectrum Disorder. Our family has spent the last 10 years fighting to provide our son with a free and appropriate education. The public system first failed Henry at three years old when a critical transition from Birth to Three into a pre school program did not occur and the public school turned Henry away. The system failed Henry again during his elementary school years when we had to fight for testing, and then fight for special education and an individualized education program. My husband and I were forced to fund social skill groups and other private services to help our son while valuable time was lost fighting our school district's denials. There have been attorney costs, mediation hearings, outplacement costs and the list goes on. There has been therapy for the depression and the post traumatic stress Henry developed during his public school experiences. Henry has Autism Spectrum Disorder, and a very splintered set of skills. He has difficulty functioning in some settings due to deficits in social communication and executive function. Henry is a young man with an IQ of 115 and therefore is considered as "ASD only" amongst Connecticut's human service agencies. As Henry approaches transition, I have begun to learn this means there are less services and supports available for Henry.

As Henry approaches graduation, he is worried about his future. We search to understand what services are available to help him prepare for and find competitive employment. Employment is a major barrier for individuals with ASD transitioning to independence. Henry wants to work but does not yet have the soft skills critical for successful job interviews and employment retention. I've been counseled to apply for DDS's Autism Waiver but hear the wait list is currently over 400 people long. I've been counseled to apply to DORS but do not know if he will qualify for supports to help him acquire and retain skills to prepare for work. I ask for the passage of bill 6860 and the pilot to improve transitional services for employable young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder to help these young adults become employed and enjoy the satisfaction and independence of being employed.

Thank you.